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Stephen M. Barr, *The Believing Scientist: Essays on Science and Religion*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016. Pp. vi + 226. Pb. £16.99. ISBN 978-0-8028-7370-5.

Stephen Barr is an American Roman Catholic professor of theoretical particle physics: his earlier book ‘Modern Physics and Ancient Faith’ is a useful contribution to the field of science-and-religion. ‘The Believing Scientist’ brings together a variety of short essays, lectures, book reviews and blog posts which showcase his readable style and gift for the helpful analogy in explaining complex scientific matters.

The essays are divided into sections: lengthy ones covering evolution, mind and soul, and the Big Bang and creation, and shorter ones looking at reductionism, science as a substitute for religion, finding God through science, and ‘mischievous myths about scientific revolutionaries’. There is a heterogeneous feel to the book, due not just to this wide range of topics but also to each essay being an ‘occasional piece’, adopting a style and tone appropriate to its original context. Thus there are lectures, explaining particular scientific ideas and/ or pointing out that they do not bear the anti-religious interpretations sometimes given to them. There are book reviews which deal (often very entertainingly) with a number of best-sellers which bear on themes in science-and-religion. There are topical pieces, such as an essay addressing Cardinal Schönborn’s 2005 attack on neo-Darwinism. In many of these essays Barr shows himself to be an articulate and extremely well-informed Catholic apologist.

A collection like this inevitably has strong and weak points. On the plus side, one sees the development of an author’s thinking, evidenced here in the way in which Barr initially gives a cautious welcome to the idea of Intelligent Design (in his review of Behe’s book ‘Darwin’s Black Box’) before repudiating the movement to which it gave rise on the grounds that ‘Its main consequence has been to strengthen the general perception that science and

religion are at war' (p. 72). On the minus side, there is a good deal of repetition of material: the same quotation from Hermann Weyl appears on p. 19 and p. 83, quotations from Wigner and Crick similarly pop up more than once, and Barr repeats his own analogies (e.g. of God as an author, in both chapters 16 and 17).

This is, perhaps, an ideal book for the bedside table: one to pick up and put down again, rather than ingest in large helpings. There are certainly many bite-sized chunks to relish: I particularly enjoyed a number of Barr's book reviews, covering as they do works by such writers as Stephen Jay Gould, Stephen Hawking, Francis Collins, Thomas Nagel and David Chalmers; and his splendid put-downs of Dawkins' 'A Devil's Chaplain' and 'Unweaving the Rainbow' (the latter being memorably described as 'a 300-page non sequitur' (p. 186)) are in the same league as Terry Eagleton's celebrated demolition of 'The God Delusion' for the London Review of Books.

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